EARTHTRACES

FOURTH BOOK OF ODES

STEVEN FRATTALI

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Where do you go?

green time rain filled say

far into which day

so the light so

the cloud shale

so the cool wind

brown leaves blown

hair where when

that day

Banks of

light deep in the sun pond

far in the convex of blue

"Here" shimmers

Pond blue iris
cataract lily pads
Sun swan

Branch ice

spider web

ice coated shining

sun capillaries

veins

sun heart beating

bright loud and loud

through the sky

Sun

beyond the burnt edge

light ash on steep hills

the sun vortex funelling down

the earth's throat

Midsummer grass yellow green

the wave of the wind

not one many waves smaller eddies

gathering small breaking

wind streams

currents the grass lake

ripples of hay

sun pulse nearly white sun pale sky

heat shimmer at the dark tree shore

day so hot and dry

A pinecone drops straight

through the pine boughs

taps the dirt

quietly

the sandy smooth dirt

Earth tap

so clear a sound in the day

you think I will go that way

you feel the ground

Night clouds are dusty blue but the moon is white

the breeze very faint

like sugar pouring through the trees that pillar up high

sand stars float in the sky

and we look up
from where we are
dark leaves grown in your cheek
and on your eye

and on your chest dark branches with two soft buds She stands in

the room's space

bright green leaves outside

happen to be

stands here the light's half circle

pale lemon

and her shadow on the wall

Stands there

the dust the floor

Her hair not gold but

so

only one time to be here only one time to see

Sun monstrance
burning clouds like marble
the radiant hosts
invisible

Earth of sky

trees mountains hills of sky

hanging down from

but not down

Roads of sky

not hanging from open to

Waters rivers rains of sky

coming from returning

No longer sky of earth but instead

earth of sky

The time clouds flow silver
blue high sky
hot sun the day
bright mystery

Green your heart

daylight fills the bowl

where the sun swims

deep in the ripples elusive burning blue

How to find it?

Three leaves float beneath

gold leaves copper and red suspended

eaten with small holes ragged

yet green your heart

An acorn with a few leaves

wet with the rain on the wet grass

beside the mud beneath the

huge tree crown still dripping

What small small things

Green sky
east
breaking sun yoke
the fire hills

Violet sky west dust speck stars gray surf of trees

Slowly quickly long shadows on the path of pant leg and sneaker

gold grass filling with streaks of light

The leaf sun branches of sky

sun of many many suns

light clarity

outward everywhere

not one sun only but one and more than one each day

like leaves

or bright spots

in the pond

world of many worlds

sky of many skies

too high too full of light

to be just one

Tree shape

of rain

rain sheath around

rains tapping batting down trough and spill

through roofs of leaves

to the puddles on the low grass and bare ground

Scent of rain water and leaf
of wet earth
the fields drifting here
in the wet air
in the needling breeze

splash spritz essence essences lifting us into the air to feel

dim green

Ascend the twilight ladder

green shape of shade and just outside and around

filled with rain sound

and rain sounds

is more rain

Green violet air not dark

Light leakage

edges fields around houses

ray shot depth pin point sun far in fir boughs

leaves in layers nearer

Light injection into Now

Shapes open from dark to twilight

dimensions fill suffused

breathe

See the sky now see the trees

Radiant king

from total darkness

from below the hill the field the road's end

from the mountain's back

from the ocean's fury

from the earth's far edge

where all might perish

from the dead land itself

from sleep

Radiant king

A corn field at evening

the landmark oak tree back lit in a sun cube

crystal cross sections of slanting light hold the world still

and yet it cannot be held

Swallows flow through as though sucked in by a vacuum

around and over and up then gone

The corn shifts and wavers in the breeze inside itself it is burning

clouds move through the sky constructions of sooty bronze stained marble

What is being sought

by these lives
these powers movements?
Where will it end and how?
And who will know it?
--while the sun cuts through the world
in a moment again and again

creating destroying revealing

Wheat field

in dawn light moving in the wind that moves over you

Wind from the sun
in the first of day
what do you feel?
in the movements of rain
your stems and roots

Motions of wind eddies like quick wood shavings in the golden moiré and grain

shimmer of currents here there

now in the strange light as though at the beginning of human time

Now

the earth crack opened one centimeter

and the powers outside come streaming in cosmic light and time

known here touching us

Flowers on the pea vines

the bees' curve toward

then partial helix

up

hesitant swerve closer around

now hover

a moment now

galaxies spiraling through unimagined distance

the sun white luminous funnel point

where tidal waves volcanic flows of radiation that could drown Hiroshima's fire lake

what word for this?

Three bees rummage together in one white pink flower

looking close translucent white capillaries net the sunlight there is no skin so fine

by chance

in another corner

two cabbage whites

tatter upward

tingling to the sun

Day garden silent

sky sun still

clouds just

slowly increasing

come quick breeze and rain

so hot so dry

soak down gray dirt toad limping off there

bean leaves have a curled yellow fringe but should be all green

on the hard smooth path dust glitters like filings

Bright snowfields the river frozen knife scar down the valley's face

sun-fields of sky

blinding

sun fields of earth

and the road not visible

Midnight

dark trees wet trunks clear in headlights

leaves down

October

the green moonlight

Evening

the cold now the air filled with the sky emptiness

deep frozen blue

yet with green a little

light leaving the world

disappearing

small differences degrees

as when a person very near to death and then

is dead

soon now total night

Fallen sun burnt char of hills

tarnishing clouds molten light sky burning away

darkening west edge scorched abraded the end of day unnoticed

strangers the others seen

darkness now

just barely
and secret
who you ask the wind

papers leaves scraping and where

night of the tiger the panther night of wind hyenas

yet original night

Snow fall night time fall

drift outward

elsewhere

space and time

freezing fear each day greater

stranger

fallen here when yet remember

earlier so long

light cards

light tokens signatures collected held

the message in faint creases lines

what will happen

rock print grain of wood

consider

and the other saying words giving signs

in fear of what will happen

Frozen

and the night

no beginning no end

winter stars

myth tigers

grant immortality

I spit

and it is frozen already.

immortal crystal

the wakeful present breath vapor

the bomber's vapor trail

against orange green sunset

light incision into light

fabled life forgotten sold as soon as born

genital mutilation and yet forgotten

remembered in secret script

Sun above snow

white hills of dry-ice

phosphorous vapor in light haze

the river cannot be seen

Gather the cloak of leaves

do you need this
the wind says
the water the air

earth leavings light leavings

gather unused but not forgotten

on your stair

wrap the counterpane of stars up in your dream put it away there

use it someday

somewhere

Green valley yellow sun haze peach colored dawn

light cocoon the valley is wrapped in

pea green hills set forth for three corners

stitched with bright roads

Leaves to the covered

earth

now dissolving

rain bleed

so many colors never seen elsewhere

white smoke over all

fire smoke frankincense acid in the cold air the time beneath mist

With luminous ropes and figures smoke tangles your face

slowly pull free

Stones from the rain bed

water marks of dim green and slate

from the field hollow where dews collect

from the wind and hail and from hundred degree suns

where the wind filed with sand with soil with water with just itself

Where you would hear molecular tingling of wind on stone

silicate graphite quartz
bright names like edges
where light glints and glances
edges where no name can stick

surfaces where no word adheres corners that turn back every gaze

I am I have been the stone says you must look elsewhere

Bright green sky orange horizon

sky of gold and opal cloud above the sun

half sun disc a molten coin half way down a slot

Nearer us streaming scorched cloud vortex underlit tatters

What part of the earth is burning now?

Blinded I ask When shall we see it?

When shall we see it all?

The blackened world

light burnt

is sealed

silent

silent the surface radiance the apparent plane of being

Absent now the overpowering sun

and yet I still am blind

Buildings glimmer thin and insubstantial

liquid at their edges
in the ravening sunset
merest outlines sketches
in the quenching night

In the faces drifting

floating

in the aftermath

to whom can one speak to whom listen?

World listening

empty speech

rustling

dry leaves faces

announcing

strangers who approach saying

listen be silent

paper burning books cities

Where known not known

feel the earth drift where when colored lights

mind script how to grasp help me to know

and fall away finished the ancient stories

vendible and the physician

Now something else is rising invisible motion silence gathering

darkness teems the possibilities

when a different life a different earth

The grass

clover with white

italic shadows too

and trees around hang darkly into

the green space

of sun

sun pool

warm bright air currents floss moted light cuts through tree boughs

a few leaves ripple

Close eyes now sun face shining

feel brightness of day

passing touch of air

cool slight friction

feel soft rough cool grass waxy earth smell of green

warm air sun breathing grass points in your ear

The time of the sun wind streams through gold grain fields

hot breeze near the road small stones at the shoulder shining gray white

Hear the day heat in the field near the white farm house above flower beds burning air

dark tree shore beyond the fields slight wind surging still there

yet even there heat shimmer through the air like gasoline fumes

No rain coming now blue skies of no cloud and no rain needed only

sun burning in roots sun in stems sun germ sun leaves of apple trees cherries peaches the tomatoes

the green broad translucent lettuce leaf the beans vines

bright fields of clover burning corn rows at noon at dusk

Now see three brown horses graze in a field of blazing yellow grass the aluminum water trough flashes

Summer made

the pea vines bees

flowers

in the sun light

Touch leaf or stem soft petal of vascular light

summer made the flower's scent of sweet rain

wind

light made bees their hum

bright flight of gold

made

grass water flowing cool warm clear from green hose and faucet to peppers corn and beans

the plum tree high and dark green and light made

The dark light in cells oxygen

of rain water light

drops of

glucose as intravenous

the leaf light vessel stretches

to alter

the web

So much depends

on the how on where when

on these

small hidden things

Very early now

green stems of rain light
water paths
of the
bean shoot carrot
onion here the sun soil
with night crawling

flood of shiny black mud

worms for fishing the stream
light yellow rocks
light web
at ten feet nearly pea green water
in the early morning
mist on the bay
the water's blooming as my uncle said

Very early now basil bush here fragrant on your fingers with dots of bright rain lady's earrings

Sun

high above snow

hills

sky

clear

no wind no sound

snow dust

blown away in air

Standing in the garden feel wet air leaves breathing early morning

leaf breath I'm breathing too

inhale water air into

lung leaf

stretching branch spine
my arms stretch wide mouth open
capillary
leaf pattern webbed and
rippled with veins of movement

and in the pond three gold fish breathing

water light

Season of the falling leaf

and sun-fall too

at evening slanted light through boughs across the tanning and ploughed-over fields

the gold green hills in the middle distance charged with a startling clarity
and weightless a moment
in the orange and mercurochrome light
cross sections streaming through the back-lit oak

sight lines converging somewhere out beyond the burning porthole of the low sun disc

We see so deeply now

earthly life implying something more and yet what could be more?

And sunlight

signifying what? you say of what quality? or simply what *is* light?

And every day
on table chair
across the tiled floor
on the cream colored tiles
pale brick and steel of the dormitory complex

making a blue soap bubble reflection in a deep bay window flashing like a signal mirror on parked car windows down the blazing city street high high windows where it seems to shimmer slightly gold

on the razor wire and metal gate
of the expensive apartment building
on the still sheet of mercury
that is the entire side of a bank

or else we see it in the clouds themselves that float so freely over head

inhabitants of the open blue

and of that thin blue white beyond the blue and in the cloud reflection in the bright office window where the roped and hanging window washer places his long metal pole

Windows in rain waterfalls slide down the blue gray of the day

The dim green

the trees like blotches of lichen ragged whitish stone green stalagmites but furry looking misted
as though they'd been frozen set in motion with a tattered stiff waving like someone waving a broken wrist say very dim as though remembered as much as seen

The town is full of fog horns now traffic sizzles past streaks of traffic lights

in the wet glass

On the fire escape rain water the drops very clear although from a smoky sky

are battering the red geranium its pot is overflowing

and drops hang in a row some more gravid and others less

from the black chipped fire escape rail

Rachel

in the bright light at the edge of the world the sun so hot the confusing day and voices in the light

speaking calling shouting

dust in the air gray ochre

the open spaces of the desert and yet

not open not a desert "there" we say "over there" and others "home"

But at home

what does one do?

What does one do feeling at home

to the Other also there?

In the bright light standing with no shelter against the voices

refusing to hear refusing to not see

You stood and stand now

Young tree

You cannot be uprooted

Hot today still air

no cars around the park is empty midday although

shouts from the children's wading pool

a block away

fragrances near the flowering shrubs

open the window to take them in and not just to know

to feel the day and not merely see

to hear feeling knowing

what is in the voices calling in the light

even though some sit here on the benches they yet have their window closed

Sun beyond earth edge

twisted hills with buildings frayed end of charred fabric

light barely reaching through crimson saffron and green

we here watching

Cold wind turns leaves bronze think of it soft crazing of skin at eye corner inside of elbow gray hair in pubis

and your new daughter purchased from China

the slit throat blood spattering trousers like paint action painting of the hierarch

where there is gold there is blood

the severed head eyes closed

these are portents

The illusions given worlds withheld by the dream

the images

tunnel of memory mindscript

the announcers saying, listen be silent

archaic syllables of ancient texts blazing portico of sunset the great gate of night

black leaves of the night tree

leaves painted with yellow moonlight gold leaves and amber

see them floating in the well
gather them they are precious
dive through the bright surface
the oil slick of dreams
fill your shirt breast with them then

Carried back long afterward late evening of your journey

for exhibition in public places

Late spring night full of wind-blown trees

new leaves snapping and chattering wild already thick

green and yellow green

and lit a silver gray in the flowing moonlight moon that parts from clouds like someone taking off her robe

Moonlight the green moonlight on my hands

and grass is painted almost black by shadows on the lawn

Spring's million rains
drops sheets buckets
emptied from the roof clear web flowing
around one black wrought iron rail
where stretched between two pineapples
a luminous ventricle pulses

icicles of falling water bright spitballs

cast up as from a welding torch

These from three different eaves
while windy rain comes down
through half leaved trees and full that wave and wave

as it lances through them

itself full of grass of fields nearby
flowers weeds are in it
 water from the rivers lakes
 mountain streams are here and every little creak
 all contributing
in some way this is them
 in some way this is everything
 but wait

Lightning etching down somewhere

and the expanding air cracking crackling with formless energy

new life insubstantial unfixed as of yet

Light streaks

on the water's surface

the river shows mercury apartment blocks

a warehouse a river walk with its tall streetlights

part of a parking garage

light crinkles are splashed over it from the wind that raises bruises of darker water and tree rings of ripples

It is green water overall

mud tinted but clean and the day still clear enough for reflections

with its high intense blue sky

grassy spring air

and small puff cumuli here and there

Paths

under the apple trees

in the autumn rain soaked grass windfalls all around

some are slick-mashed the air has a clean taste

These apples no one eats they are crabs

small red streaked with white quite sour

yet even if not good to eat they perfume the air

one particular morning after the rain
I still remember

Voices in the snow

saying the tree must be burnt to its final ash

remnants of ice and the last stars

drift in the tree bark

Where you hear the final pages rustling so fast even though it is the wind

so fast to elude the fire itself as they burn

Like the man on the large screen in the movies music

is the best thing though they always say where the word must starve

but the music man is rich

that country

what was its name can't remember

can you hum it snow is always falling here

But the face

of the burning man is melted sunk below this pool of snow water

here in your palm

where the rivers part around the ice flows turn backward can you grasp them

and so deep inside the tree trunk

the book was burned at last

pages and all

And the tree in the steep pomegranate light of dawn bore its first crop of stones the smooth polished stone of silence

Apples red pears peaches dusty black grapes

cool water from a glass gallon kept in the whitewashed stone cellar

string beans from the vines in a metal colander

a green cardboard basket
with a curved wicker handle
dirt flecked on its side
filled with red tomatoes

a small glass of pink wine tarty and sharp made two falls ago here in this back yard

snow

fell all night

early morning not white but quieter

but where this window showing

one tree patched with bandages soaked cardboard limbs white brows and epaulets

air still dark like bilge water

opposite window then find the pearl light blooming through watered milk

silver point trees roots trunks eaten away as though unfinished

feather brocade lowered and lowered world of silence

Open road now the rain comes on

sun shower at first

sun winded over with silver clouds

they bloom off to white shining again but still rain and then

more colder now get a drop on ear in eye

don't see or hear the same
cap tapped down on
two or three times more
fat drops this time (one on wrist)

crossing the field

We have some mud from last night stomp right through don't worry

facing into the sun

streaming straight on we have to go we have to hurry

shadows reach out back of us and from a row of trees the brown grass tinted we climb the low hill

and white peas of hail come down

A white barn a gravel road beside it curving the small stream farther on

Inside

the special dark the tools
the metal tines hanging leather
lanterns rakes and brooms
stalls for the animals silently there
in one stall a bull

A corner turned see the tall hay loft bales above a pond of loose hay below

a stream of light slants across from one unseen wall hay pieces floating in it very still

But yet the waterfall of hay the children jumping down shouting to each other from the stream of light

into the loose hay laughing

With willows and white benches

the shore walk hangs into sky

three gulls tuck themselves more tightly

cold ripples spread wind water roughs gray

a center of still blue
though
with green willows
and three white clouds

What will we do when it is really Winter?

when we are old alone and cannot pay?

Stranger no one knows me

I go wherever wandering

white dust road white sky yellow hay fields

Later the wind chilled rain burned me

Lightning fires in the west

The world full of smoke

Down so many bus routes

Highways the dark cabs of the eighteen wheelers lights sweep inhabitants the color of cement

Can one pick wild berries?
In the shade of a fir tree
drinking from a can
I wondered this

Dawn bedroom

wooden window casing and dark green curtains hanging a little off one of them stained

The wooden bedroom floor
always a little dusty
books piled here and there
a couple of half empty bottles
one scotch one vodka in a side cabinet
leaded book cases in one wall
but way way past their prime

We're three floors up
two windows have screens one does not
methical and rays angling in
through a window shade tear
a shade of that tan color
I associate with the sails of junks

You never use ash trays

just cans or paper cups and two such cans are on the floor beside the book you set face down

the green cape of one long curtain trails inward in a breeze it is frayed around its pseudo William Morris hem

And yet it is a beautiful moment anyway

dirt has collected inside the sill we ought to keep the place a little cleaner

it was a beautiful moment anyway

as I've already said

you lying still asleep in bed and the early light suddenly clear letting one see the building opposite really to see it not just to know it's there the spring air blowing in and yes it is the spring

beautiful moment when we suddenly unexpectedly can see

In the green light

underneath the leaves

arbor aquarium light

and straighter light bored through the old board slats

you come and go zebra striped by the wire trellis

the dirt floor crowded with grape shadows our feet could tread shadow wine

imagine being drunk on that

reach me the dark cup
one day but not now

for now we're sitting here
in the arbor light
it is not sepia yet but will be
the benches are old white at one time
paint mostly gone it looks like news shreds

the old grapes twine up and around grandfather planted them perhaps to rejoin one's ancestors is the great thing after all

grape clusters here and there along the canopy brown purple in the twilight

Rake

all the vines together in a pile

it is the autumn now

we must prepare

colder the mornings

sun mist frost

in the air

Tomatoes bean vines pepper plants cucumber zucchini

the summer's yield this was a living climate

Vines and leaves and roots it all must go be burnt up

in the middle of the garden scraped raked together

with dry fallen leaves

quite unceremonious a world is over

Matches

fire catching

from a lit scroll of news crannies of orange at first

liquid the flame translucent then spider hollow burnings

flaming catacombs tunnels matted jungles webbed with sparks stick forest furnaces of ash

then from the mound smoke streams spread smoke vortex

thick choking yet fragrant Breathe the intoxication of true ending

even as a boy

home for the day from school

in my old evening work clothes

I used to love it

Sun of late afternoon

growing larger light growing complex tinted and yet the lit clouds nearest me

strangely near

how directly my sight knows them how far is it from here to there

it cannot be very far

Thunderhead capitol

drifting evolving structure out of structure

shining so whitely

harboring caverns of sheet lightning

far within

a parallelogram of light

combs aslant

through all these changes marking an alien region

the clouds themselves must flow through

Constant movement in the sky

of winds and clouds

Day makes an open

unobstructed field

for the light and motion of the cumuli to be displayed in

it is the splendor of light and of movement

in their starkest forms

the glory of visibility

the raiment of divinity is here without divinity

with nothing but these elements and space the empty sky

Afternoon

September and

a yellow field near the highway

the special sunlight of this time

it cannot be described

part summer part autumn filled with both

and therefore more than full

richness beyond richness beauty more than beauty

and yet empty

One white butterfly is here

milkweed in the light

the sound of traffic

The autumn

lives in fire

the suspicion of flame

in the morning's ice

the puddle catches daybreak

the red maple tree burning in wind

clouds move through flame at evening bright orange and opal

sky fire earth tinder of black hills

the woods blazing at midday

of their own

burning passing

now

as though

ready

Existence

seething in its own

poise

contradictions

-- the leaves

flowers fruit --

in its ripeness

clear being of many facets

seen beside me in this sky

these ripples

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place at one time for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan.

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had various occasions to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any language which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliche?

Yes or not even a cliche but in a way worse than that. Much

of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that

you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost and Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism.

About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2009 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.